

Impacts from the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation: An Evaluation of the 4-H Current and Emerging Leadership Initiative



OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE

In 2005, the 4-H Current and Emerging Leadership initiative was formally launched to aid in the development of leadership skills for 4-H professionals across the country. This effort is led by National 4-H Headquarters, CSREES, USDA in collaboration with the National 4-H Leadership Trust, National 4-H Council, the State 4-H Program Leaders and National Association of Extension 4-H Agents.

The success of 4-H in the 21st century is dependent upon the leadership guiding the system. Towards this end, the 4-H Current and Emerging Leadership initiative is designed to help facilitate and strengthen the development of critical skills necessary for achieving the 4-H vision, through a variety of professional development experiences. These experiences are targeted towards current State 4-H Program Leaders, new hires at the national level, and other 4-H professionals with an interest in understanding the scope of leadership in 4-H.

The intended outcomes of the initiative are for participants to:

- Learn and apply operational and strategic leadership concepts to 4-H youth development
- Be prepared to take on greater responsibility and exhibit strong leadership for years to come
- Build relationships for the future that reflect cohesion, trust, and continuity
- Positively impact the long-term success of the 4-H movement (Stone, 2005)

INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION & ACTIVITIES

In 2005, three programs were offered as part of the Current and Emerging Leadership Initiative. This evaluation focuses on the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation.

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation was conducted using mixed methods, based upon Kirkpatrick's Levels of Evaluation (Winfrey, 1999). The State 4-H Program Leader Orientation was assessed at Levels 1 and 2 (Table 1).

Table 1 *Kirkpatrick's Levels of Evaluation* (Winfrey, 1999)

Level	Description	Appropriate Method	Evaluation
1	Reactions	Quantitative	
2	Knowledge, Skills, & Attitudes	Quantitative	
3	Transfer	Qualitative	
4	Results	Qualitative	



The State 4-H Program Leader Orientation online questionnaire was designed using the same process as the instrument for Choosing to Lead. This time, no revisions were made after the review for content validity. The same three questions were used to assess Kirkpatrick's Level 1, while nine additional post-then questions were developed to assess Level 2. Again, these questions corresponded to the objectives of the orientation.

In 2005, twenty people participated in the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation. There were an additional six new participants in 2006, as well as seven repeat participants. A total of twenty-five possible participants were invited to take part in the evaluation process via an e-mail with a direct link to the survey. One program attendee no longer worked as a state 4-H program leader, and was not included in the survey sample. Repeat participants were instructed to evaluate only their first orientation experience. Of the original twenty-five participants, there were twenty-two valid e-mail addresses. As with the Choosing to Lead evaluation, three reminders were sent to non-respondents at three-day intervals (Dillman, 2000).

Sixteen participants responded. However, only fifteen respondents completely filled out the questionnaire, resulting in an overall response rate of 68%. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS 12.0 for Windows.

FINDINGS

Level 1: Reactions

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with three questions about their involvement in the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation, using a Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree/Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree). Respondents tended to rate the program favorably (Figure 2). Eighty-three percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, "I enjoyed participating in the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation," "I feel that participating in the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation was worth my time," and "I feel that participating in the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation was a positive experience."

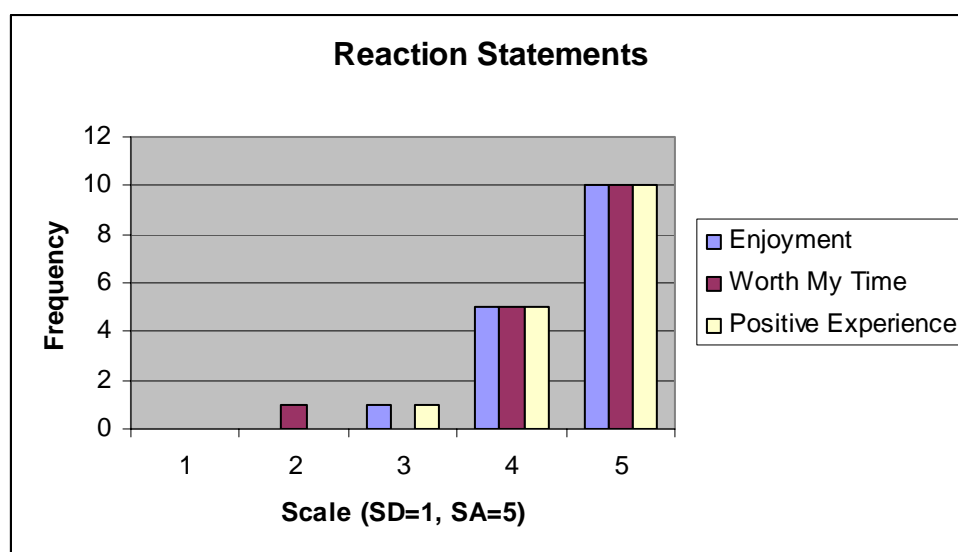


Figure 2: Responses to State 4-H Program Leader Orientation reaction statements (n=15).



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Level 2: Knowledge and Attitude

To assess the knowledge and attitudes gained as a result of the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation, participants were asked to indicate their agreement to a set of nine statements. Two responses to each statement were necessary: a “before attending” level of agreement and an “after attending” level of agreement. In general, participants perceived they increased their knowledge as result of the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation and slightly improved their attitudes (Table 3).

Table 3

Responses to State 4-H Program Leader Orientation: Knowledge & Attitude Before and After Attending

Statements	% of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree"	
	Before	After
I understand the role of a State 4-H Program Leader within my own state.	54	87
I understand the role of a State 4-H Program Leader at the national level.	40	93
I can accurately explain my role as a State 4-H Program Leader to another person.	53	74
I clearly understand the professional responsibilities of a State 4-H Program Leader.	66	93
I am comfortable filling my role as a State 4-H Program Leader.	40	67
I have very few concerns about what it means to be a State 4-H Program Leader.	33	34
I have a positive attitude about being a State 4-H Program Leader.	93	93
I would recommend being a State 4-H Program Leader to other qualified individuals.	80	80
As a result of attending the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation, I have a network of professional colleagues with whom I can discuss critical issues.	47	87

b The first two groups represent the first program objective, split into skills and attitudes; the final statement represents the second objective.

IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the State 4-H Program Leader Orientation was well-received by participants. In the area of knowledge improvement, participants indicated that the Orientation was successful. Levels of agreement rose more than twenty percent for each of the four questions measuring knowledge gained, which is a substantial increase. It is important to note the relatively low level of agreement - 40% - with the statement, "I understand the role of a State 4-H Program Leader at the national level," prior to attending the Orientation. This may be a statistic indicative of widespread uncertainty that is not unique to new State 4-H Program Leaders only. An increased understanding of this role could be beneficial for 4-H personnel at all levels, helping to clarify expectations employees have of their Program Leaders.



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Participants have positive attitudes about working as Program Leaders, but are decidedly less confident about their own abilities to fulfill the role. Some of the uncertainty was resolved as a result of attending the program, but participants remained largely undecided about whether or not they had concerns about being a Program Leader. Part of these findings may be attributed to the relative inexperience at the Program Leader level of participants. Confidence levels are likely to increase as participants have the opportunity to grow into their positions, but it is important to be aware of this issue when planning future Orientations.

Specific recommendations include:

- Continuing the general format of Orientation.
- Developing materials to address the role of a State 4-H Program Leader at the national level for non-participants, possibly including state specialists and county agents and educators.
- Developing a competency model specific to State 4-H Program Leaders.
- Continuing to offer activities that foster a network of relationships between program participants.

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